

Obscured by Clouds

4K digital animation, 8 channel sound

Duration: 10:52 minutes

In Alfred Hitchcock's film *Suspicion* (1941) a glass of milk is presented to the film's protagonist, Lina (played by Joan Fontaine), by her new and possibly murderous husband Johnnie (played by Cary Grant). The milk is offered as a tonic, something to calm Lina's suspicions, but at this stage in the film Lina is quite sure Johnnie is not who she thought he was, and suspects it is poisoned. When filming, Hitchcock lit the milk from the inside, making it appear luminescent, becoming a focal point of both Lina's suspicion and the viewer's gaze. Deleuze described this moment in the film as a rarefied image where the accent of the frame is placed on a single object.¹ Here the construct of film and film making is used to single out the drink as a symbolic object in the narrative's structure. In that moment, when Lina is caught in a state of anxious ambiguity, the milk represents her suspicion materialised.

While an object of suspicion is often re-enforced by a person's bias, it can also destabilise their perspective, existing as the focus of their anxiety while simultaneously obfuscating the truth. In Hitchcock's film, this state of uncertainty causes Lina warranted paranoia, but in the context of *Obscured by Clouds*, this ambiguous state is desirable. It is the uncertainty surrounding Mountford's intention which expands the possibilities for viewer interpretation and enables the appropriated material to operate beyond the bounds of its source.

Subsequently for Mountford, it is less desirable to declare every reference, as cementing the work within a historical and local context can remove a generative level of obscurity. However, the artist also acknowledges that often an artwork reflects the times in which it's made, and he began working on *Obscured by Clouds* early in 2020, when the world's political, environmental and health systems were all in crisis. As Melbourne descended into the numbness of lockdown, Mountford experienced a malaise peppered with moments of anxiety. Although *Obscured by Clouds* does not cast a lens on those specific events, it too oscillates in a similar way, and is sometimes sceptical, sometimes serene. Like Lina in *Suspicion*, the work suspects the authenticity of its situation, of its context, but its vision like ours is obscured.¹

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Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).